



*“The fundamental  
basis of this  
Nation’s laws  
was given to  
Moses on the  
Mount.”*

*President Harry S. Truman*

## Harry Truman and The Ten Commandments

Harry Truman made frequent public references to the Ten Commandments as the “basis of this Nation’s laws.” In 1937, in his first speech as a U.S. Senator he denounced corporate profiteering at the expense of the common man in Biblical terms: “We worship Mammon; and until we go back to ancient fundamentals and return to the Giver of the Tables of the Law, these conditions are going to remain with us.” As President, he said, “The Ten Commandments have not yet been universally achieved . . . yet we struggle constantly to achieve them.” On another occasion, Truman said that “The Ten Commandments and the Sermon on the Mount are all the ethical codes anybody needs.”

Truman was proud of his Kentucky Baptist ancestors who migrated to Missouri shortly before he was born. As he put it, both sets of grandparents and his parents “were Baptists, the Trumans vehemently so.” Harry’s mother taught him to read using a large-print family Bible and he claimed to have read it through twice before he was twelve. At his inauguration in 1949, he chose to be sworn in on two Bibles: one opened to the Sermon on the Mount, and the other opened to the Ten Commandments.

Sources:

Truman Presidential Library

David McCullough, *Truman* (Simon & Schuster, 1992)

Alonzo Hamby, *Man of the People: A Life of Harry S. Truman* (Univ. of Missouri Press, 1994)

J. Lacey, ed., *The Truman Presidency*

Illustration:

*Harry S. Truman Being Sworn Into Office* (copyright Bettman/CORBIS January 21, 1949)

Page from Owsley Family Bible, courtesy of Thomas D. Clark Center for Kentucky History.

52 *The ten commandments.* EXOD

Before CHRIST 1491.

not come up to mount Sinai: for thou chargest us, saying, Set bounds about the mount, and sanctify it.

24 And the LORD said unto him, Away, get thee down, and thou shalt come up, thou, and Aaron with thee: but let not the priests and the people break through, to come up unto the LORD, lest he break forth upon them.

25 So Moses went down unto the people, and spake unto them.

CHAP. XX.

1 *The ten commandments.* 18 *The people are afraid: Moses comforteth them.* 22 *Idolatry is forbidden.* 24 *Directions concerning building an altar of earth, and altars of stone.*

AND God spake all these words, saying,

2 <sup>a</sup> I am the LORD thy God, which have brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage.

3 <sup>b</sup> Thou shalt have no other gods before me.

4 <sup>b</sup> Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of any thing that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth.

5 Thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them: for I the LORD thy God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers, upon the children, unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me;

6 And shewing mercy unto thousands of them that love me, and keep my commandments.

7 <sup>c</sup> Thou shalt not take the name of the LORD thy God in vain: for the Lord will not hold him guiltless, that taketh his name in vain.

8 Remember the sabbath-day, to keep it holy.

9 <sup>d</sup> Six days shalt thou labour, and do all thy work:

10 But the seventh day is the sabbath of the LORD thy God; in it thou shalt not do any work, thou, nor thy son, nor thy daughter, thy man-servant, nor thy maid-servant, nor thy cattle, nor thy stranger that is within thy gates.

11 For <sup>e</sup> in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is, and rested the seventh day: wherefore the LORD blessed the sabbath-day, and hallowed it.

12 <sup>f</sup> Honour thy father and thy mother; that thy days may be long upon the land which the LORD thy God giveth thee.

13 <sup>g</sup> Thou shalt not kill.

14 Thou shalt not commit adultery.

15 Thou shalt not steal.

16 Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbour.

17 <sup>h</sup> Thou shalt not covet thy neighbour’s house, thou shalt not covet thy neighbour’s wife, nor his man-servant, nor his maid-servant, nor his ox, nor his ass, nor any thing that is thy neighbour’s.

18 <sup>i</sup> And all the people saw the thunderings, and

<sup>a</sup> Deut. 5. 6. Plain 81. 10. <sup>b</sup> Heb. servants. <sup>b</sup> Levit. 26. 1. Plain 97. 7. <sup>c</sup> Levit. 19. 12. Deuter. 5. 11. Matth. 5. 33. <sup>d</sup> Chap. 23. 12. Ezek. 20. 12. Luke 13. 14. <sup>e</sup> Gen. 2. 2. <sup>f</sup> Deut. 5. 16. Matth. 15. 4. Eph. 6. 2. <sup>g</sup> Matth. 5. 21. <sup>h</sup> Rom. 7. 7. <sup>i</sup> Hebr.